Certain embodiments of the present invention provide a game system including a first character set, a character exchange component, and a competition component. The first character set is adapted to include at least one character. At least one character in the first character set is adapted to be alterable by a user. The character exchange component is adapted to allow at least one character from the first character set to be exchanged. The competition component is adapted to allow a competition including at least one character in the first character set and at least one character in a second character set.
Figure 1

100

Player

110

Client

120

Network

130

Game Engine

150

Database

160
Figure 4A

The Continuum - Game Wireframes

Lobby: Overview

1. Global Navigation - global throughout the "Lobby" area. Use to display high level navigation. Also display players online here.

2. MultiTab area - player and game browser. Available players: Displays players that are not currently in a game. Also displays basic info about said players. All players: Displays all connected players. Buddies: Buddy list functionality. Optimatch: A list of "open" user initiated games.

3. Displays selected player from left or other pertinent support information in the case of Optimatch. (detailed later)

4. Global chat system: color coded, channel based model. Minimal to start with but built with the idea of future expansion. Users will be able to subscribe/describe from channels via text commands and the UI.

This chat model will also allow us to easily display system messages to all or specific users. E.g. "That buddy name does not exist"
Figure 4D

The Continuum - Game Wireframes

Game: Setup

1. Game settings tab, lists all game settings and both players can edit these settings.
2. Stakes options. Set how you want to handle stakes (see game design docs for stakes types). You must edit what you are offering in the select stakes tab.
3. Stakes: Shows current stakes here. We should also somewhere here indicate if this is a ranked game or not.
4. Player info on your opponent
5. Accept or cancel game setup. If you are setting up a quickmatch, the text of the buttons would change to start quickmatch or something similar.
6. World map: User selects their battlefield here. On rollover of each map section, there is a little more info on each battlefield type. Or possibly the map zooms into that battlefield.
Figure 5D

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Figure 6

600

610 Receive Authentication Request from a Player

620 Authenticate Player

630 Select a Developable Character from a Set of Characters

640 Exchange Selected Character
SYSTEMS AND METHODS FOR MULTI-CHARACTER ONLINE GAMING

RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] The present application relates to and claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional App. No. 60/_____, entitled “Systems and Methods for Online Gaming,” filed Aug. 3, 2006. The foregoing application is herein incorporated by reference in its entirety.

FEDERALLY SPONSORED RESEARCH OR DEVELOPMENT

[0002] [Not Applicable]

MICROFICHE/COPYRIGHT REFERENCE

[0003] [Not Applicable]

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0004] The presently described technology generally relates to computer gaming. More particularly, the presently described technology relates to systems and methods for multi-character online gaming.

[0005] Role-playing games (RPGs), such as Dungeons and Dragons™, allow a player to develop a character through the course of game play. As a player uses a character during the course of an adventure or gaming session, the character gains experience points that may be used to increase characteristics or skills of the character. For example, a character may be built up from a lowly peasant to an overpowering hero by slaying numerous monsters encountered during an adventure.

[0006] Typically, a player of an RPG controls a single character for a particular adventure. Sometimes a player may utilize the character across multiple adventures. However, typically once a character is “killed” in the course of an adventure, a player must start over by creating a new character.

[0007] In RPGs, it is unlikely a player would trade a character to another player. The player invests time and effort into building up and developing a character over a series of gaming sessions. This investment generally results in a personal attachment to the character, making a player reluctant to trade the character to someone else. Additionally, a major component of an RPG, as the name implies, is the role-playing of the character by the player. A character is more than just a collection of numbers representing characteristics and skills. Rather, characters have life breathed into them by their player. Thus, a player’s attachment to a particular character, along with the role-playing elements of RPGs, results in a character rarely, if ever, being traded to another player.

[0008] Thus, RPGs allow a player to develop a single character. However, a player of an RPG typically does not play multiple characters at the same time. In addition, players do not typically trade characters.

[0009] Magic: The Gathering™ ("MTG") combines elements of card games with RPGs. Typically, a card game includes a set number of cards, such as a deck, some or all of which are unique. For example, cards may have values, such as numbers from two to ten, jacks, kings, queens, aces, and jokers. As another example, cards may be distinguished by suits, such as hearts, clubs, spades, and diamonds. A card may be unique through a combination of value and suit, for example. Card games are limited in that the value of the cards and the rules of the game are generally fixed. In a game of MTG, two players compete against each other by taking turns playing cards, with the goal of inflicting a predetermined amount of damage on the opponent. For example, the first player to reduce the opponent’s life value from 20 to 0 wins.

[0010] In MTG, there is a universe of hundreds of cards available, although during the course of any particular game, a player uses a deck of limited size, such as 60 cards. A card in MTG may represent creatures, artifacts, and spells, for example. In addition, MTG cards may have different colors, representing a specialization in certain kinds of abilities. MTG cards are fixed. That is, a particular card describes the abilities and/or effect of a particular creature or spell, for example. The MTG card does not change or evolve over the course of multiple games. During the course of game play, one card may modify the behavior of another card, but such a modification is specific to that particular game and does not persist across multiple games.

[0011] After playing a game of MTG, a player may use his cards in a subsequent game. That is, even if a creature card is defeated in the course of one game, that creature card may be used in subsequent games.

[0012] MTG also incorporates the concept of collectibility. That is, cards in MTG are collectibles. Trading cards have long been collectibles. Baseball cards are an example of a type of collectible trading card. In MTG, a particular card may be part of a set, for example. Players may then desire to collect all the cards in a set. Such a set may have greater value monetarily and/or within the game. In some instances, certain MTG cards may be scarce. As a result of scarcity, certain cards may have a higher perceived value due to the difficulty in obtaining such cards.

[0013] Another aspect of collectibility in MTG is that when a player purchases a pack of cards, the player does not know what cards are in the pack until the player opens the pack. Thus, players often end up with duplicates of cards which are more common. Players may then trade cards with each other to acquire cards they do not have.

[0014] Thus, a player of MTG typically has multiple cards of various types. In addition, players of MTG may trade cards. However, MTG cards have fixed values and/or characteristics.

[0015] Everquest™ ("EQ") is an online RPG. A player creates an account with a login and password. The account is associated with a particular character. The player may then participate in quests in the online environment with his character. As the player is successful in attaining goals and defeating creatures in the game environment, experience points are awarded. The player may then increase the character’s abilities by “spending” the experience points. Although a player may trade or sell access to his account, and thus his character, such actions are generally discouraged. In addition, a player may only control a single character through the player’s account.

[0016] EQ does not support a mechanism to transfer a character as part of the gaming system. Players may auction a login and password to a character in an online forum such as eBay. The winning bidder then receives the login and password for the character and may take control of it. However, this transfer occurs outside the scope of the EQ system.
Thus, an EQ player controls a single character that may be developed. EQ characters are not traded as part of the game. In addition, an EQ player controls only a single character at a time.

While many of the aspects of the various gaming systems discussed above contribute to their popularity, it is highly desirable to have a gaming system that combines the development of multiple characters with collectibility and the ability to trade in a computer gaming system. Thus, there is a need for systems and methods for multi-character online gaming.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Certain embodiments of the present invention provide a game system including a first character set, a character exchange component, and a competition component. The first character set is associated with a first player. The first character set is adapted to include at least one character. At least one character in the first character set is adapted to be improved at least in part by the first player by altering at least one of a plurality of attributes associated with the at least one character. The character exchange component is adapted to allow at least one new character to be acquired for the first character set. The competition component is adapted to allow the first player to compete with a second player in a competition. The second player is associated with a second character set. The second character set is adapted to include at least one character. The competition involves at least one character in the first character set and at least one character in the second character set.

Certain embodiments of the present invention provide a game system including a first character set, a character exchange component, and a competition component. The first character set is adapted to include at least one character. At least one character in the first character set is adapted to be alterable by a user. The character exchange component is adapted to allow at least one character from the first character set to be exchanged. The competition component is adapted to allow a competition including at least one character in the first character set and at least one character in a second character set.

Certain embodiments of the present invention provide a method for exchanging a character in a game including selecting a selected character for exchange and exchanging the selected character. The selected character is included in a first character set. The first character set is associated with a first player. The first character set is adapted to include at least one character. At least one character in the first character set is adapted to be improved at least in part by the first player by altering at least one of a plurality of attributes. At least one character in the first character set is adapted to compete in a competition with at least one character in a second character set.

Certain embodiments of the present invention provide a computer-readable medium including a set of instructions for execution on a computer, the set of instructions including a character set routine, a transaction routine, and a competition routine. The character set routine is configured to support a first character set. The first character set is adapted to include at least one character. At least one character in the first character set is adapted to be alterable by a user. The transaction routine is adapted to allow at least one character from the first character set to be exchanged. The competition routine is adapted to allow at least one character in the first character set to compete in a competition with at least one character in a second character set.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF SEVERAL VIEWS OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 illustrates an online, multi-player gaming system according to an embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 2 illustrates a server for a gaming system according to an embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 3 illustrates a functional view of a gaming system according to an embodiment of the present invention.

FIGS. 4A-4D illustrate examples of various screen configurations for a client to a gaming system according to embodiments of the present invention.

FIGS. 5A-5D illustrate examples of various schemata that may be utilized a gaming system according to embodiments of the present invention.

FIG. 6 illustrates a flow diagram for a method for exchanging a character in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

The foregoing summary, as well as the following detailed description of certain embodiments of the present invention, will be better understood when read in conjunction with the appended drawings. For the purpose of illustrating the invention, certain embodiments are shown in the drawings. It should be understood, however, that the present invention is not limited to the arrangements and instrumentality shown in the attached drawings.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Certain embodiments of the presently described technology include systems and methods for multi-character online gaming. Certain embodiments combine gaming system elements including collectibility, character development, and trading. In addition, certain embodiments further combine gaming system elements including war gaming, customization, online distribution, and/or online game play.

For example, in one embodiment, a gaming system called The Continuum™, collectibility, character development, trading, war gaming, customization, online distribution, and online game play are combined to create a gaming experience. The Continuum™ is an online, collectible, war game where the characters in the game develop like in a role-playing game, are customized to a player’s tastes, and are traded like cards.

In The Continuum™, a player has a collection. The collection includes the characters associated with the player. Each character has one or more attributes. The attributes may include characteristics, statistics, and/or abilities, for example. For example, a character may have ratings for intelligence, strength, speed, and/or dexterity. As another example, a character may have attributes indicating offensive and/or defensive capabilities, skills, and strengths. These attributes may affect the character’s performance in a competition such as a battle, for example. The characters in a player’s collection may be grouped into one or more armies. A character may be in multiple armies. The armies may be configured for different types of competitions, for example.
A character in The Continuum™ has a point value. The point value may initially be fixed or predetermined when the character is purchased. The point value may reflect, in part, the rarity or scarcity of the character. For example, the more rare and/or powerful the character, the more points the character may be worth. In addition, the point value may reflect and/or be based at least in part on one or more attributes of the character, such as type, level, characteristics, abilities, ability levels, and/or equipment. As a character develops and its attribute values change, the point value of the character may change as well. Thus, the point value of a character in The Continuum™ may represent the effective strength of the character. The point values associated with characters may be used to level the playing field for battles. For example, each player may agree to play a certain point value game (e.g., a 100, 500, or 1000 point game). The gaming system then allows a player to field an army from the player’s collection of any size up to the point value of the game.

After a battle, each player may be awarded a certain amount of experience points. The experience points may be used to increase the value of the character’s attributes. That is, experience points may be “spent” to increase one or more attributes of a character at the player’s discretion. Alternatively, the player may choose to have the experience points spent automatically, letting the gaming system determine how the points should be allocated. As a player is developed, the point value of the character may change.

Players of The Continuum™ may buy, sell, trade, and auction characters. For example, a player may purchase one or more new characters from the gaming system. The purchased characters may be determined randomly. Players may also swap characters with each other. Characters may be wagered as stakes and the winner of a battle may acquire the wagered character from the loser.

FIG. 1 illustrates an online, multi-player gaming system 100 according to an embodiment of the present invention. The gaming system 100 includes one or more players 110, one or more clients 120, a network 130, and a server 140. In certain embodiments, the server 140 includes a game engine 150 and a database 160.

A player 110 communicates with a client 120. In certain embodiments, a particular player 110 in a plurality of players communicates with a particular client 120 in a plurality of clients. In certain embodiments, more than one player 110 is in communication with a particular client 120. In certain embodiments, the player(s) 110 communicate with the client(s) 120 over a network. For example, a player 110 may communicate using a Web browser over the Internet with a client 120.

The client(s) 120 are in communication with the server 140. A client 120 may communicate with the server 140 over a network, such as network 130. The game engine 150 is in communication with the database 160.

In operation, a player 110 communicates with a particular client 120 to participate in the gaming system 100. As mentioned above, one or more players 110 may use one or more clients 120 to participate in the gaming system 100. The one or more players 110 may participate simultaneously, for example. The client 120 is adapted to provide the player 110 with an interface to the gaming system 100. That is, the player 110 may use the client 120 to interact with the gaming system 100. The player 110 may communicate commands and/or actions to be performed in the gaming system 100 using the client 120, for example. The client 120 may include a graphical user interface, for example.

In certain embodiments, the client 120 may be an application running on the computing system of the player 110. For example, the client 120 may include an executable program downloaded by the player 110. In certain embodiments, the client 120 may include a Web browser. The Web browser may run an Adobe/Macromedia Flash™ program to provide, at least in part, an interface for the player 120. In certain embodiments, at least a portion of the client 120 is downloaded. For example, the client 120 may be an application program downloaded from the server 140 across the network 130. As another example, a player 110 may download the client 120 from a distribution Web site.

The client 120 is adapted to communicate with the server 140. The client 120 may communicate with the server 140 over network 130. That is, the network 130 is adapted to facilitate communication between the client 120 and the server 140. The network 130 may be and/or include a local area network (LAN), for example. As another example, the network 130 may be and/or include the Internet.

The client 120 may communicate information, such as commands, data, and/or requests, to the server 140. The information to be communicated may be based at least in part on input from the player 110, for example. For example, the player 110 may use an interface of the client 120 to indicate that the player 110 wishes to purchase a new character. As another example, the player 110 may indicate with the client 120 to the server 140 to enter into a competition with another player.

In addition, the client 120 may receive data, such as commands, responses, and/or notifications, from the server 140. For example, the client 120 may receive account information from the server 140 to display to the user 110. As another example, the client 120 may receive updates regarding the position of characters belonging to the player 110 when the player 110 is involved in a competition with another player.

The server 140 is adapted to communicate with the client 120. As mentioned above, the server 140 may communicate with the client 120 over network 130. The server 140 receives information, such as commands, data, and/or requests, from the client 120. The server 140 transmits information, such as commands, responses, and/or notifications, to the client 120.

The server 140 is adapted to process the information communicated with the client 120. Processing the information may include allowing a player 110 to manage characters, exchange characters, initiate a competition, participate in a competition, and update account information, for example. Processing may include updating the state of a competition, acknowledging a request from the client 120, and delivering messages from other players 110, for example.

The server 140 is adapted to manage characters. A collection may be associated with a player 110. The collection may include one or more characters. A character may be in only one collection. That is, a given character may only be associated with a particular player 110 at any given time. Thus, the collections of players are disjoint. Characters may be exchanged from one collection to another, as discussed below. In addition, some characters may not be associated with a collection. For example, computer controlled char-
acters may not be part of the collection of any player. As another example, characters for sale from the gaming system may not be associated with a collection.

The characters in the collection of a player may be grouped into one or more subsets. That is, the player may be associated with one or more sets of characters. Each set of characters may contain one or more characters from the player’s collection. A character from the collection of the player may be in more than one set of characters. For example, a player may create multiple sets of characters, such as armies, for use in different situations while playing the game.

Each character has and/or is associated with one or more attributes. The attributes may include characteristics, statistics, and/or abilities, for example. For example, a character may have ratings for intelligence, strength, speed, and/or dexterity. As another example, a character may have attributes indicating offensive and/or defensive capabilities and strengths. As another example, a character may have attributes indicating a particular skill, such as lock-picking. These attributes may affect the character’s performance in a contest such as a battle, for example. In certain embodiments, one or more of the attributes are adapted to be adjustable. That is, the attribute value associated with the attribute may be adjusted. The attribute value may be adjusted by a player, for example. As another example, the attribute value may be adjusted by the gaming system.

Similarly, a character may have and/or be associated with one or more ancillary characteristics. The ancillary characteristics may include a title and/or appearance, for example. For example, a character may have a title ancillary characteristic that reflects weapon specialization and/or class, such as “swordsmen” or “archer.” As another example, a character may have an appearance ancillary characteristic including an image or three-dimensional model of the character. The appearance ancillary characteristic may be visible to one or more of the players during game play, for example. An ancillary characteristic is ornamental and serves to enhance the gaming environment for the player. However, an ancillary characteristic does not affect the character’s performance in the gaming system. In certain embodiments, one or more of the ancillary characteristics are adapted to be adjustable. That is, the ancillary characteristic value associated with the ancillary characteristic may be adjusted. The ancillary characteristic may be adjusted by a player, for example. As another example, the ancillary characteristic value may be adjusted by the gaming system.

In certain embodiments, a character may be associated with a point value. The point value may reflect, in part, the rarity or scarcity of the character. For example, the more rare and/or powerful the character, the more points the character may be worth. In addition, the point value may reflect and/or be based at least in part on one or more attributes of the character, such as type, level, characteristics, abilities, ability levels, and/or equipment. Thus, the point value of a character may represent the effective strength of the character.

The server is adapted to allow character exchange. For example, the server may allow a player to purchase, acquire, bid, request, and/or trade for one or more characters. As another example, the server may allow a player to sell, relinquish, auction, offer, and/or exchange one or more characters.

In certain embodiments, the character(s) involved in the exchange are, at least in part, randomly determined. That is, the server may determine and/or select a character involved in an exchange at least in part out of the control of a player. For example, a player may request that the server provide a random character to be purchased by the player. As another example, a player may purchase a set of five characters without knowing which five characters the player will receive. As another example, two players may agree to exchange random characters of equal point value. As another example, the server may randomly award one or more characters with a particular attribute, such as belong to a specific class or having a given ability, to a player.

In certain embodiments, the exchange is based at least in part on an auction. For example, a player may acquire a character by providing the winning bid for the character. As another example, a character may be offered to a bidder in an auction.

In certain embodiments, one or more characters may be exchanged by transfer and/or trade. For example, one player may agree to trade an associated character for a character associated with another player. As another example, a player may direct the server to transfer a character to another player.

In certain embodiments, a character is exchanged for money. Money may include, for example, in-game currency and/or real-world cash. For example, a player may purchase a character from another player by paying real-world cash using a credit card. As another example, a player may acquire a character from the server using an in-game currency such as gold pieces.

In certain embodiments, a fee is assessed on the exchange of a character. For example, a fee may be assessed to the player acquiring a character. As another example, a fee may be assessed to the player relinquishing a character. The fee may be money, as described above. For example, a player may purchase a character from another player using cash and may be assessed a transaction fee. As another example, a player may transfer a character to the winner of an auction for the character and be assessed a fixed-price fee of in-game currency. The fee may be assessed in a different form of money from the money used in an exchange. For example, two players may trade characters along with other items and/or in-game currency. A fee may be assessed to one or both players in the form of real-world cash, even though no real-world cash was involved in the exchange.

In certain embodiments, a player acquires one or more characters based at least in part on a subscription. That is, a player may indicate to the server that the player desires to acquire one or more characters based on a subscription. The player may indicate the subscription by registering, for example. The subscription provides one or more characters to the player at some time interval. For example, a player may sign up for a monthly subscription where the player acquires a pack of 5 characters every month. As another example, a player may sign up for a subscription where the player acquires a character every time a predetermined surplus of in-game currency is achieved.
The account of the player 110 may be automatically debited and/or charged based on the subscription, for example. Alternatively, a player 110 may be prompted whether an acquisition based on the subscription should be performed. The prompt may indicate default behavior. For example, the acquisition may occur within five days of a notification unless the player 110 indicates to the contrary to the server 140.

As is discussed in more detail below, in certain embodiments, an exchange can occur based at least in part on competition. For example, an exchange may occur based at least in part on the result of a competition. As another example, an exchange may occur based at least in part on an occurrence during a competition, such as the capture of an item, geographic location, or character.

The server 140 is adapted to allow a competition. That is, the server 140 supports at least one competition involving at least one player 110. For example, a first player 110 may compete with a second player 110. The players compete using one or more characters associated with each player. The players may compete with each other and/or against other players, for example. That is, one or more players 110 may compete using their associated characters against characters associated with one or more other players 110. For example, three players 110 may be involved in a three-way, every-player-for-themselves battle. As another example, two players 110 may compete cooperatively against two other players 110.

In certain embodiments, a player 110 may manually select other participants in a competition. For example, a player 110 may select a buddy to compete with. In certain embodiments, a player 110 may request a competition where the other participants are similarly matched. That is, a player 110 may request to be matched with one or more other players 110 who are also looked to be matched for a competition. The matching of players for a competition may be based on one or more competition parameters specified by the player 110 requesting the match. For example, the player may request a competition with a particular minimum, maximum, or range of point values. That is, as discussed above, characters may have associated point values and the match may limit the sum of the point values of the characters participating in the competition. For example, a player 110 may request to be matched for a competition with another player, where each player is allowed to participate with characters having point values up to 1000. The player 110 may use a set of characters, such as an army, that the player 110 has previously constructed for use in a 1000 point maximum value competition. Other parameters may be specified for the match, such as types of stakes to be wagered (discussed below), length of game, and/or map size.

The competition may include a battle between the characters, for example. As another example, the competition may include a game. The game may be similar to capture-the-flag, king-of-the-hill, annihilation, or an objective-based assault, for example.

In certain embodiments, the competition includes one or more characters controlled by a computer, such as an artificial intelligence. The computer may be the server 140, for example. For example, a player 110 may battle against characters controlled by the server 140. As another example, one or more players 110 may compete in cooperation with and/or against characters controlled by the server 140.

In certain embodiments, the competition is turn-based. For example, three players 110 competing against each other may take turns issuing commands to their respective characters involved in the competition. In certain embodiments, the competition is substantially real-time. For example, two players 110 competing against each other may issue orders to their associated characters simultaneously.

In certain embodiments, one or more players 110 may wager stakes on the outcome of a competition. For example, two players 110 competing in a battle against each other may wager an agreed-upon amount of money on the outcome of the battle. The money may be in-game currency and/or real-world cash, for example. The amount wagered may be a fixed amount or a computed amount. For example, a player 110 may wager 10% of the player's in-game currency at the end of the competition. As another example, a player 110 may wager money based on the number of characters left standing at the end of the competition. Thus, if a player 110 wins by a larger margin, more money is won, for example.

In certain embodiments, the stakes include one or more characters in the collection of the player 110. For example, two players 110 may each select one of their opponent's characters to be awarded upon winning the contest. As another example, each player 110 participating in a competition may designate one or more characters to wager on the outcome of the competition. As another example, the characters wagered may be specified by a percentage of the total point value of the collection of the player 110.

When stakes include one or more characters, the exchange capabilities of the server 140 described above may be invoked. For example, the winner of a battle may acquire a character that has been wagered as stakes in the battle by another player. In certain embodiments, the exchange capabilities of the server 140 are at least partially integrated with the competition capabilities of the server 140.

Based on the outcome of a competition, experience points may be awarded. Alternatively, in certain embodiments, experience points may be purchased with money. In certain embodiments, experience points may be acquired from another player 110. As mentioned above, a character may be developed over the course of gameplay. The experience points may be used to adjust the attributes of one or more characters. For example, a player 110 may use experience points to improve the characteristics and/or abilities of one or more characters in the collection of the player 110. In certain embodiments, the player 110 may manually allocate the experience points to adjust a character's attributes. In certain embodiments, the player 110 may have the experience points automatically allocated by the gaming system 100.

In certain embodiments, before a competition, a player 110 may receive a scouting report on the characters of another player 110 participating in the competition. The scouting report may include details of the number of the characters in the other player's collection, the attributes of those characters, the types of those characters, the point values of those characters, the levels of those characters, and/or outcomes of prior competitions the other player has been involved in, for example.

In certain embodiments, the server 140 is adapted to support merchandizing. That is, the gaming system 100 may provide merchandise using, at least in part, the server
The merchandise may be based at least in part on a character. For example, the gaming system 100 may allow a player 110 to purchase merchandise, such as a toy, action figure, poster, trading card, comic book, clothing, animation, and/or apparel, based on one or more of the player's characters. For example, the gaming system 100 may allow a player 110 to purchase an action figure similar in appearance to a character in the collection of the player 110. As another example, the gaming system 100 may allow a player 110 to purchase a comic book illustrating a competition the player 110, or a particular character of the player 110, was involved in.

In certain embodiments, the processing by the server 140 described above is performed at least in part by the game engine 150 and/or the database 160. For example, the game engine 150 may be adapted to provide character exchange and/or competition capabilities. As another example, character data and/or account information for a player 110 may be stored in the database 160.

The game engine 150 may include one or more components for tasks such as communicating with the client 120, exchanging one or more characters, and handling competitions between one or more players 110. The game engine 150 may be implemented on a single computing system or across multiple computing systems. The game engine 150 may include fault tolerant features to allow continued operation in the event that one or more components fail.

The database 160 may be utilized by the game engine 150. The database 160 may store information regarding the state of the gaming system 100, for example. For example, account information for the players 110 may be stored in the database 160 and referenced by the game engine 150 for authorization and billing purposes. As another example, the database 160 may store information relating to the characters and collection of a player 110.

As discussed above, the components, elements, and/or functionality of the gaming system 100 may be implemented alone or in combination in various forms in hardware, firmware, and/or as a set of instructions in software, for example. Certain embodiments may be provided as a set of instructions residing on a computer-readable medium, such as a memory, hard disk, DVD, or CD, for execution on a general purpose computer or other processing device.

FIG. 2 illustrates a server 200 for a gaming system according to an embodiment of the present invention. The server 200 may be similar to the server 140, discussed above, for example. The server 200 includes a gaming engine 250 and a database 260. The gaming engine 250 may be similar to the gaming engine 150, discussed above, for example. The database 260 may be similar to the database 160, discussed above, for example.

The gaming engine 250 includes a communication component 252, an exchange component 254, and a competition component 256. The database 260 includes one or more character sets 265.

The gaming engine 250 is in communication with the database 260. The communication component 252 is in communication with the exchange component 254 and the competition component 256.

In operation, a player communicates with the server 200 using a client. The player may be similar to the player 110, described above, for example. The client may be similar to the client 120, described above, for example. For example, the player may communicate with the server 200 to sign on to the gaming system. As another example, the player may communicate with the gaming engine 250 as part of playing the game, including activities such as playing characters, developing characters, and engaging in competitions with other players.

The game engine 250 is adapted to allow one or more players, such as players 110, to participate in the game. The game engine 250 is adapted to communicate with the players. The communication may be handled at least in part by communication component 252, for example. The communication may be between the server 200 and one or more clients. The clients may be similar to the clients 120, described above, for example. Information such as commands, data, requests, responses, acknowledgements, and notifications may be communicated between the gaming engine 250 and the players.

The gaming engine 250 is adapted to process information communicated with the players. The processing may be performed at least in part by the exchange component 254 and/or the competition component 256, for example. For example, a player 110 may request a character be exchanged for in-game currency associated with the player's account. The request may be processed by the exchange component 254. As another example, the competition component 256 may send an update to the player indicating the current state of a battle between the player and another player.

The communications with the player and/or the client may be handled by the communication component 252. The communication component 252 is adapted to communicate with one or more clients, such as clients 120. The communications component 252 may communicate with the player 110 through the client 120, for example. The communication with the player may be over a network such as the Internet or a LAN, for example. Information, such as commands, data, and/or requests, may be received from the player 110 and/or the client 120, for example. Information, such as commands, responses, and/or notifications, may be communicated to the player 110 and/or the client 120, for example.

The exchange component 254 is adapted to allow a character to be exchanged. For example, the exchange component 254 may allow a player 110 to purchase, acquire, bid, request, and/or trade for one or more characters. As another example, the exchange component 254 may allow a player 110 to sell, relinquish, auction, offer, and/or exchange one or more characters. The character may be a new character for the player 110, for example. The character may be exchanged for money, such as in-game currency and/or real-world cash, for example.

In certain embodiments, the character(s) involved in the exchange are, at least in part, randomly determined. That is, the exchange component 254 may determine and/or select a character involved in an exchange at least in part randomly. For example, a player 110 may request that the server 200 provide a random character to be purchased by the player 110. The server 200, in turn, utilizes the exchange component 254 to determine the random character and initiate the exchange to the player 110. As another example, two players may agree to exchange random characters of
equal point value. After each player’s assent is signaled to the server 200, the exchange component 254 may perform the exchange.

In certain embodiments, the exchange component 254 is adapted to allow an exchange based at least in part on an auction. For example, a player 110 may acquire a character by providing the winning bid for the character. The exchange component 254 may then exchange the character from the offering player’s collection to the winning player’s collection.

In certain embodiments, the exchange component 254 is adapted to allow a character to be exchanged for money. As discussed above, money may include, for example, in-game currency and/or real-world cash. For example, a player 110 may purchase a character from another player 110 by paying real-world cash using a credit card. As another example, a player 110 may acquire a character from the server 200 using an in-game currency such as gold pieces. The exchange component 254 is adapted to perform the exchange and assign the character to the proper player’s character set and debit the money from the appropriate account.

In certain embodiments, the exchange component 254 assesses a fee on the exchange of a character. For example, a fee may be assessed to the player 110 acquiring a character. As another example, a fee may be assessed to the player 110 relinquishing a character. The fee may be money, as described above. For example, a player 110 may purchase a character from another player using cash and may be assessed a transaction fee. As another example, a player 110 may transfer a character to the winner of an auction for the character and be assessed a fixed-price fee of in-game currency. The fee may be assessed in a different form of money from the money used in an exchange. For example, two players may trade characters along with other items and/or in-game currency. A fee may be assessed to one or both players in the form of real-world cash, even though no real-world cash was involved in the exchange.

The competition component 256 is adapted to allow one or more players to compete in a competition. That is, the competition component 256 supports at least one competition involving at least one player 110. For example, a first player 110 may compete with a second player 110. The players compete using one or more characters associated with each player. The players may compete with each other and/or against other players, for example. That is, one or more players 110 may compete using their associated characters against characters associated with one or more other players 110. For example, three players 110 may be involved in a three-way, every-player-for-themselves battle. As another example, two players 110 may compete cooperatively against two other players 110.

In certain embodiments, a player 110 may manually select other participants in a competition. For example, a player 110 may select a buddy to compete with. In certain embodiments, a player 110 may request a competition where the other participants are similarly matched. That is, a player 110 may request to be matched with one or more other players 110 who are also looked to be matched for a competition. The matching of players for a competition may be based on one or more competition parameters specified to the competition component 256 by the player 110 requesting the match. For example, the player may request a competition with a particular minimum, maximum, or range of point values. That is, as discussed above, characters may have associated point values and the match may limit the sum of the point values of the characters participating in the competition. For example, a player 110 may request to be matched for a competition with another player, where each player is allowed to participate with characters having point values up to 1000. The player 110 may use a set of characters, such as an army, that the player 110 has previously constructed for use in a 1000 point maximum value competition. Other parameters may be specified for the match, such as types of stakes to be wagered, length of game, and/or map size.

The competition may include a battle between the characters, for example. As another example, the competition may include a game. The game may be similar to capture-the-flag, king-of-the-hill, annihilation, or an objective-based assault, for example.

In certain embodiments, the competition includes one or more characters controlled by the competition component 256. For example, a player 110 may battle against characters controlled by the competition component 256. As another example, one or more players 110 may compete in cooperation with and/or against characters controlled by the competition component 256.

In certain embodiments, the competition is turn-based. For example, three players 110 competing against each other may take turns issuing commands to their respective characters involved in the competition. In certain embodiments, the competition is substantially real-time. For example, two players 110 competing against each other may issue orders to their associated characters simultaneously.

In certain embodiments, the competition component 256 supports wagering stakes on the competition. For example, two players 110 competing in a battle against each other may wager an agreed-upon amount of money on the outcome of the battle. The money may be in-game currency and/or real-world cash, for example. The amount wagered may be a fixed amount or a computed amount. For example, a player 110 may wager 10% of the player’s in-game currency at the end of the competition. As another example, a player 110 may wager money based on the number of characters left standing at the end of the competition. Thus, if a player 110 wins by a larger margin, more money is won, for example.

In certain embodiments, the stakes include one or more characters in the character set of the player 110. For example, two players 110 may each select one of their opponent’s characters to be awarded upon winning the contest. As another example, each player 110 participating in a competition may designate one or more characters to wager on the outcome of the competition.

When stakes include one or more characters, the exchange capabilities of the exchange component 254, described above, may be utilized. For example, the winner of a battle may acquire a character that has been wagered as stakes in the battle by another player. In certain embodiments, the exchange component 254 is at least partially integrated with the competition component 256.

In certain embodiments, when a character is defeated in a competition, the character is still available for use in subsequent competitions. That is, the character persists across competitions. In certain embodiments, when a character is defeated in a competition, the character is “dead” and may not be subsequently utilized. In certain
embodiments, when a character is defeated in a competition, the character is captured by the victorious player and is placed into the character set of the victorious player and removed from the collection of the losing player. The result of a defeat of a character during a competition may be determined based on the stakes wagered for the competition. The transfer of a character may be facilitated by the exchange component 254, for example.

The database 260 may be adapted to manage characters. Each character may be associated with one or more character sets 265. Each character set 265 is associated with a player. More than one character set 265 may be associated with a particular player. A particular character may only be associated with one particular player 110 at any given time, although, as mentioned, the particular character may be included in more than one character set 265. Characters may be exchanged from one character set 265 to another character set 265, as discussed above. A character set 265 may be an army, for example.

The database 260 may manage attributes associated with each character. The attributes may include characteristics, statistics, and/or abilities, for example. For example, a character may have ratings for intelligence, strength, speed, and/or dexterity. As another example, a character may have attributes indicating offensive and/or defensive capabilities and strengths. These attributes may affect the character’s performance in a competition such as a battle, for example.

The database 260 may manage ancillary characteristics associated with each character. The ancillary characteristics may include a title and/or appearance, for example. For example, a character may have a title ancillary characteristic that reflects the specialization of the character and/or class, such as “swordman” or “archer.” As another example, a character may have an appearance ancillary characteristic including an image or three-dimensional model of the character. The appearance ancillary characteristic may be visible to one or more of the players 110 during game play, for example. An ancillary characteristic is ornamental and serves to enhance the gaming environment for the player. However, an ancillary characteristic does not affect the character’s performance in a gaming system.

The database 260 may be utilized by the game engine 250. The database 260 may store information regarding the state of the gaming system, for example. For example, account information for the player 110 may be stored in the database 260 and referenced by the game engine 250 for authorization and billing purposes. As another example, the database 260 may store information relating to the characters and collection of a player 110, such as the characters’ attributes, attribute values, ancillary characteristics, and ancillary characteristic values.

The information stored and managed by the database 260 may be based on one or more schemas. For example, an account schema may be used to represent information pertaining to the account of the players 110. As another example, a schema may manage game play information for a player 110. Information such as characters in the character set 265 of the player 110 may be tracked within the schema, along with statistics and configuration options. As another example, data relating to competitions may be stored in the database 260 based on a schema.

As discussed above, the components, elements, and/or functionality of the server 200 may be implemented alone or in combination in various forms of hardware, firmware, and/or as a set of instructions in software, for example. Certain embodiments may be provided as a set of instructions residing on a computer-readable medium, such as a memory, hard disk, DVD, or CD, for execution on a general purpose computer or other processing device.

In operation, the communication processor 310 handles communication with a player. The communication processor 310 may communicate information to the player about events in the gaming system, for example. For example, the communication processor 310 may transmit messages from other components of the gaming system 300, such as the account processor 320, to the player.

The communication processor 310 may be implemented using a client and a communication component. The client may be similar to the client 120, described above, for example. The communication component may be similar to the communication component 252, described above, for example.

The communication processor 310 may present a graphical user interface to a player, such as player 110. Alternatively, the communication processor 310 may provide data to a separate processor that provides the interface directly to the player. For example, the communication processor 310 may provide data to a Adobe/Macromedia Flash™ application running in a Web browser on the player's computer.

The communication processor 310 may receive information from the player. For example, the player may request to be logged-on or authenticated to the gaming system 300. The player may communicate a username and password to the gaming system 300. The communication processor may receive the username and password from the player and pass the username and password to the account processor 320. The account processor 320 may determine the password is valid for the username to authenticate the user. The account processor 320 may register the player as being logged-in as a result of the successful authentication. The account processor 320 may then provide an indicator to the communication component 310 that the player has been properly authenticated. The communication component 310 may then send a message to the player indicating the successful authentication.

The account processor 320 handles processing related to the account of a player. For example, the account processor 320 maintains the collection of the player. The collection includes the characters associated with the player. The account processor 320 may store information such as the password, billing information, and account preferences, for example. As discussed above, the account processor 320 may authenticate a player, for example. As another example, the account processor 320 may allow a character to be added or removed from the collection and/or a character set assoc-
ciated with a player. The addition or removal of a character from a player’s collection by the account processor 320 may occur in cooperation with the exchange processor 340, discussed below.

[0108] The competition processor 330 handles setting up, running, and completing a competition. The competition may involve one or more players. Setting up the competition may include, for example, matching two or more players to compete. Setting up the competition may include wagering stakes on the outcome of the competition. Setting up the competition may include selecting the characters to be included in the competition. For example, two players may agree to participate in a competition using a maximum point value of characters on each side. For example, a player may agree to field an army in the competition where the total point value of the characters in the army does not exceed 1000. The competition processor 330 may determine the point value of a character based on the attribute values of the character. For example, a character with higher attribute values may have a higher point value.

[0109] The competition processor 330 may also handle running the competition. Running the competition may include deploying the characters of the players on a map, for example. The characters may move around a landscape over the course of the competition. Characters from opposing players may engage in combat during the competition. In certain embodiments, when a character is defeated in a competition, the character is still available for use in subsequent competitions. In certain embodiments, when a character is defeated in a competition, the character is “dead” and may not be subsequently utilized. In certain embodiments, when a character is defeated in a competition, the character is captured by the victorious player and is placed into the collection of the victorious player and removed from the collection of the losing player. The result of a defeat of a character during a competition may be determined based on the stakes wagered for the competition. The transfer of a character may be facilitated by the exchange processor 340, for example.

[0110] The competition processor 330 may also handle the completion of a competition. When a competition has been won, the winning player receives the stakes wagered by opposing players. As discussed above, stakes may include characters and/or money, for example.

[0111] The competition processor 330 may be implemented at least in part with a competition component. The competition component may be similar to the competition component 256, discussed above, for example.

[0112] The exchange processor 340 handles exchanges involving a character. An exchange of a character may include the character being purchased, acquired, bid for, requested, traded, sold, relaunched, auctioned, and/or offered. A character may be exchanged for another character and/or money, for example. For example, a character may be purchased by a player from the exchange processor 340. Money is transferred from the account of the player and the purchased character is added to the collection of the player. As another example, a player may offer a character for sale at an auction. Other players may bid on the character, and the winning bidder may receive the character in exchange for whatever was bid. The exchange processor 340 may assess a transaction fee on an exchange. For example, a player 110 may purchase a character from another player and be assessed a transaction fee by the exchange processor 340.

The exchange processor 340 may work in cooperation with the competition processor 330. For example, the exchange processor 340 may transfer a wagered character to the winner of a competition supported by the competition processor 330.

[0113] The exchange processor 340 may be implemented at least in part with an exchange component. The exchange component may be similar to the exchange component 254, discussed above, for example.

[0114] The development processor 350 handles the development of a character. For example, a player may receive development or experience points after winning a competition supported by the competition processor 330. The development points may be used by the player to develop a character in the collection of the player. A player may “spend” development points to adjust the value of one or more attributes of the character, for example.

[0115] As discussed above, the processors, components, elements, and/or functionality of the gaming system 300 may be implemented alone or in combination in various forms in hardware, firmware, and/or as a set of instructions in software, for example. Certain embodiments may be provided as a set of instructions residing on a computer-readable medium, such as a memory, hard disk, DVD, or CD, for execution on a general purpose computer or other processing device.

[0116] FIGS. 4A-4D illustrate examples of various screen configurations for a client to a gaming system according to embodiments of the present invention. The client may be similar to the client 120, described above, for example. The gaming system may be similar to the gaming system 100 and/or the gaming system 200 described above, for example.

[0117] More particularly, FIG. 4A illustrates an exemplary screen configuration for a main lobby interface to the gaming system. For example, the lobby interface may include a global navigation menu, allowing a player to switch between different components and/or features of the gaming system, such as trading and competitions. As another example, the lobby interface may include a list of players and/or games currently waiting for participants. The list of players may include a “buddy list,” for example. As another example, the lobby interface may allow information about a particular player to be examined. As another example, the lobby interface may include one or more chat rooms or channels. Players may communicate with each other through the chat rooms to, for example, arrange a battle or trade.

[0118] FIG. 4B illustrates an exemplary screen configuration for managing the characters of a player. The management screen may allow a player to build armies or sets of characters, equip a character with an item, and develop a character in the collection of the player. For example, the management screen may allow a player to browse the characters in the collection associated with the player. As another example, a player may view and/or edit attributes and/or ancillary characteristics of a particular character. The particular character may be selected from the list of characters in the collection of the player. The view of the particular character may include a picture of the character and access to a detailed back-story for the character. As another example, the management screen may allow a user to adjust the attributes of a character.

[0119] FIG. 4C illustrates an exemplary screen configuration for exchanging a character. The exchange screen may
be used by a player to participate in an exchange similar to exchanges described above, for example. For example, the exchange interface may allow a player to request and/or accept a request for a trade with another player. As another example, the exchange interface may allow to browse or view the characters in the collection of the player and/or items associated with the player. As another example, a package of one or more characters and/or other items, may be offered in the trade. As another example, the exchange interface may allow a user to confirm a trade.

0120 FIG. 4D illustrates an exemplary screen configuration for setting up a competition. The competition screen may be used by a player to configure a competition to participate in. For example, the competition interface may provide a view of current game settings such as point value, participants, and time allowed. As another example, the competition interface may allow a player to wager staks on the outcome of the competition. The competition interface may allow the player to see what stakes have been wagered and what kinds of stakes may be wagered. As another example, the competition interface may provide information on other players participating in the competition, such as an opponent. As another example, the competition interface may allow a user to accept the configuration of the competition and to enter the competition.

0121 FIGS. 5A-5D illustrate examples of various schemas that may be utilized a gaming system according to embodiments of the present invention. The schemas may be utilized by components such as the database 160 and/or the database 260, discussed above, for example.

0122 More particularly, FIG. 5A illustrates an account schema according to an embodiment of the present invention. The account schema may represent data related to an account owner, such as a player. For example, the account schema may represent data such as account registration information, account preferences, and account billing information. Some of the data represented by the account schema may be adjustable by the account owner. For example, the account owner may adjust the first name, last name, mailing address, and preferences associated with the account.

0123 FIG. 5B illustrates a game schema according to an embodiment of the present invention. The game schema may represent data related to the gaming experience of an account owner. For example, the game schema may represent data such as game statistics, collection, armies, squads, and units.

0124 FIG. 5C illustrates a game administration schema according to an embodiment of the present invention. The game administration schema may represent data related to the overall gaming system. For example, the game administration schema may represent data such as characters, character types, and equipment.

0125 FIG. 5D illustrates a game schema according to an embodiment of the present invention. The game schema may represent data related to each game played. For example, the game schema may represent data such as battlefield identifier, stakes, game length, and point value.

0126 FIG. 6 illustrates a flow diagram for a method 600 for exchanging a character in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. The method 600 includes the following steps, which will be described below in more detail. At step 610, an authentication request is received from a player. At step 620, the player is authenticated. At step 630, a developable character is selected from a set of characters. At step 640, the selected character is exchanged. The method 600 is described with reference to elements of systems described above, but it should be understood that other implementations are possible. In addition, the method 600 refers to a set of characters, but it should be understood that the term "set of characters" may include the collection of a player, a subset of the collection of the player, or a group of characters from the collections of one or more players.

0127 At step 610, an authentication request is received from a player. The authentication request may be received over a network, for example. The authentication request may be a username and password, for example. The player may be similar to the player 110, described above, for example. The authentication request may be received at a server, similar to server 140 or server 200, described above, for example. The authentication request may be received by a communication processor similar to communication processor 310, described above, for example.

0128 At step 620, the player is authenticated. The player may be similar to the player 110, described above, for example. The player may be authenticated by an account processor similar to account processor 320, described above, for example. The authentication may be based on the authentication request received at step 610, described above, for example. The player may be authenticated based on a username and password, for example. For example, a username and password may be received in an authentication request and provided to an account processor. The account processor may compare the password against a stored password associated with the username. If the passwords match, the player may be authenticated.

0129 At step 630, a developable character is selected from a set of characters. The developable character may be selected based on a command from a player. The player may be the player authenticated at step 620, described above, for example. The set of characters may be a set of characters associated with the player, for example. For example, the selected character may be chosen from the collection of the player. As another example, the selected character may be chosen from an army of the player. As another example, the set of characters may be associated with another player. For example, the selected character may be chosen from the collection of another player. Alternatively, the set of characters may be characters available for auction. As another example, the set of characters may be characters available for purchase from the gaming system. The set of characters may be similar to the character set 265, described above, for example.

0130 The selected character is adapted to be developed. That is, the character may include one or more attributes. The attributes are adapted to be changed by the player. The attributes may include characteristics, statistics, and/or abilities, for example. For example, a character may have ratings for intelligence, strength, speed, and/or dexterity. As another example, a character may have attributes indicating offensive and/or defensive capabilities and strengths. These attributes may affect the character's performance in a competition such as a battle, for example.

0131 In certain embodiments, the character is selected using a client similar to client 120, described above. Selecting the character may involve communicating a requested selection from a player, such as player 110, to a gaming
engine. The gaming engine may be similar to gaming engine 150 and/or gaming engine 250, described above, for example.

[0132] In certain embodiments, the selected character may be developed using a development processor similar to development processor 350, described above. In certain embodiments, the selected character is adapted to participate in a competition. The competition may be provided by a competition component similar to competition component 256, described above, for example. The competition may be provided by a competition processor similar to competition processor 350, described above, for example.

[0133] At step 640, the selected character is exchanged. In certain embodiments, the selected character may be exchanged for another character. For example, a player may exchange a character in the player's collection for one or more characters in a second player's collection. In certain embodiments, the character may be exchanged for money. For example, a player may purchase a new character from the gaming system.

[0134] In certain embodiments, the selected character may be exchanged for money. The money may include in-game currency and/or real-world cash, for example.

[0135] In certain embodiments, the selected character is exchanged using an exchange component similar to exchange component 254, described above. In certain embodiments, the selected character is exchanged using an exchange processor similar to exchange processor 340, described above.

[0136] Certain embodiments of the present invention may omit one or more of these steps and/or perform the steps in a different order than the order listed. For example, some steps may not be performed in certain embodiments of the present invention. As a further example, certain steps may be performed in a different temporal order, including simultaneously, than listed above.

[0137] One or more of the steps of the method 600 may be implemented alone or in combination in hardware, firmware, and/or as a set of instructions in software, for example. Certain embodiments may be provided as a set of instructions residing on a computer-readable medium, such as a memory, hard disk, DVD, or CD, for execution on a general purpose computer or other processing device.

[0138] Thus, certain embodiments of the present invention provide a gaming system that combines the development of multiple characters with collectibility and the ability to trade in a computer gaming system. In addition, certain embodiments of the present invention provide systems and methods for multi-character online gaming. Certain embodiments of the present invention provide a technical effect of a gaming system that combines the development of multiple characters with collectibility and the ability to trade in a computer gaming system. Certain embodiments of the present invention provide a technical effect of multi-character online gaming.

[0139] While the invention has been described with reference to certain embodiments, it will be understood by those skilled in the art that various changes may be made and equivalents may be substituted without departing from the scope of the invention. In addition, many modifications may be made to adapt a particular situation or material to the teachings of the invention without departing from its scope. Therefore, it is intended that the invention not be limited to the particular embodiment disclosed, but that the invention will include all embodiments falling within the scope of the appended claims.

1. A game system, the system including:
   a first character set,
   wherein the first character set is associated with a first player,
   wherein the first character set is adapted to include at least one character,
   wherein at least one character in the first character set is adapted to be improved at least in part by the first player by altering at least one of a plurality of attributes associated with the at least one character,
   a character exchange component,
   wherein the character exchange component is adapted to allow at least one new character to be acquired for the first character set; and
   a competition component,
   wherein the competition component is adapted to allow the first player to compete with a second player in a competition,
   wherein the second player is associated with a second character set,
   wherein the second character set is adapted to include at least one character,
   wherein the competition involves at least one character in the first character set and at least one character in the second character set.

2. The system of claim 1, wherein at least one character in the first character set is adapted to be manually improved by the first player.

3. The system of claim 1, wherein at least one character in the first character set is adapted to be automatically improved at the request of the first player.

4. The system of claim 1, wherein the character exchange component is adapted to allow the first player to acquire a randomly selected character.

5. The system of claim 4, wherein the randomly selected character is selected from a plurality of available characters, wherein each available character is associated with a weight, wherein the randomly selected character is selected based at least in part on the weights of the available characters, and wherein the weight of each available character is based at least in part on a scarcity of the character.

6. The system of claim 1, wherein the character exchange component is adapted to allow the first player to acquire at least one character based at least in part on a subscription.

7. The system of claim 1, wherein the character exchange component is adapted to allow the first player to acquire at least one character using an auction.

8. The system of claim 1, wherein the character exchange component is adapted to allow the first player to transfer at least one character from the first character set to a third player.

9. The system of claim 1, wherein the character exchange component is adapted to allow the first player to exchange at least one character from the first character set with at least one character from a third character set.

10. The system of claim 1, wherein the second player is a computer.

11. The system of claim 1, wherein the first player wagers a stake on the outcome of the competition.

12. The system of claim 11, wherein the stake include at least one character in the first character set.
13. The system of claim 1, wherein the competition includes at least one character from a third character set, wherein the third character set is associated with a third player.

14. The system of claim 1, wherein the character exchange component is integrated with the competition component.

15. The system of claim 1, further including a merchandising component, wherein the merchandising component is adapted to allow the first player to order a product based at least in part on a character in the first character set.

16. The system of claim 1, wherein the competition is turn-based.

17. The system of claim 1, wherein the competition is in real-time.

18. The system of claim 1, wherein the competition is against the second player.

19. The system of claim 1, wherein the first player communicates with the gaming system over a local area network.

20. The system of claim 1, wherein a fee is assessed when the new character is acquired.

21. A game system, the system including:
   a first character set,
   wherein the first character set is adapted to include at least one character,
   wherein at least one character in the first character set is adapted to be alterable by a user;
   a character exchange component,
   wherein the character exchange component is adapted to allow at least one character from the first character set to be exchanged; and
   a competition component,
   wherein the competition component is adapted to allow a competition including at least one character in the first character set and at least one character in a second character set.

22. The system of claim 20, wherein the at least one character from the first character set is exchanged for at least one character in a third character set.

23. The system of claim 20, wherein the at least one character from the first character set is exchanged for money.

24. The system of claim 20, wherein a fee is assessed when a character is exchanged.

25. A method for exchanging a character in a game, the method including:
   selecting a selected character for exchange,
   wherein the selected character is included in a first character set,
   wherein the first character set is associated with a first player,
   wherein the first character set is adapted to include at least one character,
   wherein at least one character in the first character set is adapted to be improved at least in part by the first player by altering at least one of a plurality of attributes,
   wherein at least one character in the first character set is adapted to compete in a competition with at least one character in a second character set; and
   exchanging the selected character.

26. The method of claim 25, wherein the selected character is exchanged for at least one new character.

27. The method of claim 25, wherein the selected character is exchanged based on the result of the competition between the first player and a second player.

28. A computer-readable medium including a set of instructions for execution on a computer, the set of instructions including:
   a character set routine,
   wherein the character set routine is configured to support a first character set,
   wherein the first character set is adapted to include at least one character,
   wherein at least one character in the first character set is adapted to be alterable by a user;
   a transaction routine,
   wherein the transaction routine is adapted to allow at least one character from the first character set to be exchanged; and
   a competition routine,
   wherein the competition routine is adapted to allow at least one character in the first character set to compete in a competition with at least one character in a second character set.

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